



# Office of Health Equity Legislative Report 2023

State of Utah  
Office of Health Equity  
November 2023

To: Utah State Legislature  
From: Dulce Díez, director, DHHS Office of Health Equity  
Subject: Office of Health Equity Legislative Report 2023

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## Purpose

Utah Code Title [26B-7-114](#) - Annually report to the Legislature on activities and accomplishments.

## Primary report

### Data-related activities

#### Reports published

- **Twenty years of health data in Utah**
  - The [Twenty years of health data](#) reports are six technical reports that provide data and analyses about the health status of racial and ethnic populations in Utah, namely American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian/Asian American, Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and White, non-Hispanic populations. These reports were developed using data presented in the 2005, 2010, 2015, and 2021 editions of the Utah Health Status by Race and Ethnicity reports, published by the Utah Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Office of Health Equity (OHE). The purpose of these reports is to track changes in health indicators over time and present data through visualizations and trend interpretations to identify health gaps and guide interventions. The [Health snapshots 2023](#) provide one-page summaries of each of the six technical reports in the "Twenty Years of Health Data" series as a quick reference on health disparities for racial and ethnic populations in Utah over the last 20 years.

- **Embrace project sustainability plan**

- The [Embrace project sustainability plan](#) provides a comprehensive review of the strategies, goals, and activities to sustain the Embrace project. The Embrace project is an emerging practice to address maternal mortality and morbidity and diabetes disparities among people who are Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander. This sustainability plan was a multi-organizational collaborative effort with OHE, the University of Utah Health's wellness bus, public health and healthcare researchers from the University of Utah, community-based organizations, community health workers, and community members.

- **COVID-19 Health Disparities in Utah 2020-2021 Refugee Profile**

- The [Refugee profile report](#) compiles COVID-19 surveillance data in Utah among refugee populations between March 27, 2020 and December 31, 2021. This report was developed by the DHHS Office of Refugee Health/TB Control Program in collaboration with OHE. COVID-19 indicators such as case rates, hospitalization rates, mortality rates, and cumulative vaccination percentages were used to identify COVID-19 disparities. A primary principle of health equity is to focus resources on the needs of communities most at risk for health disparities while striving for the highest standard of health for all communities. Refugee populations were negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, which compounded already existing health disparities. This report outlines recommendations for additional actions needed to address disparities experienced by refugee communities to prepare for a more equitable response to future public health crises.

- **[COVID Community Partnership project phase 4: Community health worker response to ongoing impacts of COVID-19](#)**

- The COVID Community Partnership (CCP) project phase 4 report outlines the total outcomes from the fourth phase of the project, as well as the outcomes to date since the CCP project's inception. CCP continues to address COVID-19-related health outcomes among Utah's under-resourced communities through mobilization of community health workers within community-based organizations and local health department settings. The extension into phase 5 of the project aims to focus on addressing long-term impacts of disparities compounded by COVID-19, preparation for future public health emergencies, and building community health worker capacity.

## **Data projects**

- **Demographic data collection standardization**

- OHE has continued efforts to standardize the collection of demographic data across the department, and across health and public health systems in Utah.

Uniform data collection improves data integrity and quality so relevant and reliable data is available for decision-making purposes. Standards enhance the ability to report, track, and identify opportunities to address health disparities. OHE has assembled work groups of DHHS staff, subject matter experts, and decision makers who have the knowledge and capacity to achieve project deliverables. OHE is conducting an assessment to determine the feasibility of standardizing demographic data throughout DHHS as part of transformative practice to advance health equity.

- **Data collection standards**

- As part of the efforts to standardize demographic data collection at DHHS, OHE is developing standards for the data collection in six key areas: (1) race and ethnicity, (2) sexual orientation and gender identity, (3) disability status, (4) geography, (5) housing security, and (6) language. Each set of data standards will be developed based on a thorough literature review of best practices, as well as feedback from subject matter experts to ensure data collection will be appropriate for Utah.

- **COVID-19 health disparities and social and structural determinants of health survey**

- OHE, in collaboration with the University of Utah, created and implemented a survey to increase data collection in Utah on structural and social determinants of health which impact COVID-19 infections and outcomes. The goal is to better understand racial and ethnic minority and rural populations' experiences when they access COVID-19 information and services. More than 3,000 survey responses were collected from adults throughout the state of Utah. Survey responses are currently being analyzed; findings will be compiled into reports, along with recommendations to address ongoing disparities as a result of COVID-19 and prevent disparities in future emergencies.

- **[Association of Maternal and Child Health Programs \(AMCHP\) emerging practice](#)**

- In June 2023, the Embrace project was designated as an emerging practice by the AMCHP. This designation means the Embrace project's practice summary and implementation guidelines are available on the [AMCHP Innovation Hub](#), a national database that shares resources and tools including practices and policies to explore, build, and share effective practices and work grounded in evidence by maternal and child health professionals and advocates.

- **Improving data efficiencies in independent rural hospitals**

- In collaboration with the DHHS Office of Primary Care and Rural Health and RediHealth, OHE funds a project to increase efficiency and identify health disparities through data in six independent rural hospitals.

- **National Association for State Health Policy (NASHP) learning lab**

- NASHP, with support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, has launched a multi-state learning lab with six participating states. The 6-month learning lab supports participating teams in development and implementation of state-specific data-driven policymaking approaches to address health disparities. Utah was selected as one of two states to assist the participating states in implementing similar approaches to health disparity data used in Utah. Utah was selected based on OHE's approaches to address health disparities through data collection, data completeness and accuracy, analytics, and IT processes.

## Capacity building

- **Implementation of SB104: Community health worker state certification**

- As the named implementer of SB104, OHE works with external and internal partners to implement certification processes and procedures. DHHS finalized the rule in March 2023. Externally, OHE collaborates with the Utah Community Health Worker Association (UCHWA), the community health worker professional association in Utah, to ensure a barriers-free and transparent certification process. Internally, OHE has been working with the DHHS Office of Licensing to create the online application form, the database with the certification criteria, as well as train OHE staff on how to process applications. The community health worker certification website is live and the application is available online as of November 2023. OHE and UCHWA will begin training community health workers in November and December 2023.

- **Building organizational capacity to advance health equity at DHHS**

- OHE has started the Building Organizational Capacity Assessment to advance Health Equity (BOCA-HE) project at DHHS. The BOCA-HE project aims to integrate a transformative health equity practice in DHHS to accomplish the DHHS vision of "all Utahns should have fair and equitable opportunities to be healthy and safe." Participation in the BOCA-HE project is one of the performance measures included in the DHHS Results-Based Accountability plan: "Percent of DHHS organizational units that have completed or increased their score for the Building Organizational Capacity Assessment" (Strategy 4: Create a high-quality, effective, and efficient department). This year, BOCA-HE assessments were conducted with 13 organizational units, identifying 20 activities to work on across six subdomain areas over a 12-month period.

- **Utah's first regional health equity conferences**

- In May 2023, OHE hosted the first regional health equity conferences in Utah. The conferences were held in the northern and southern regions of the state to bring

together partners who have been working on building capacity to serve communities in all areas of Utah. OHE, local health departments, and other key partners met in Cedar City and then in Logan to discuss the unique needs of rural communities, people who have disabilities, tribal members who live on tribal lands and elsewhere, and other key health equity issues faced by Utahns. For both locations, more than 200 community partners representing various health-related sectors came together to share ideas, experiences, and came away with a shared understanding of what creates health.

- **Community collaborative—COVID Community Partnership (CCP) project**
  - OHE has led the CCP project for three years, since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. This project was created to bring communities and public health together through the mobilization of community health workers to address the needs of families and communities adversely impacted by the pandemic. The CCP consists of 20 community-based organizations that serve Utah's underrepresented communities along with community health workers in all 13 local health departments. Together, this collaborative supports individuals and families with resources, supplies, and support they need. Through the collaborative this year, Utahns gained access to a number of resources such as help with housing and rent, free health-related supplies like at-home COVID-19 test kits and KN95 masks, as well as linkages to support groups in English and Spanish, among others.

## Success stories

OHE has funded partnerships with 20 community-based organizations and all 13 local health departments. These efforts not only serve the community, but also help partners to serve and support each other.

- **Facilitating access to mental health-related services and resources for underserved communities in northern Utah**
  - The Project Success Coalition (PSC), a local organization located in Ogden serving Utah African Americans, has established a partnership with the Ogden School District to support student success and address educational gaps incurred during the pandemic. They are implementing a pilot community-based mentoring program called Community That Cares that aims to address substance misuse. PSC also partners with Black Physicians of Utah to [host monthly Black Men's Mental Health Forums](#) to address mental health issues facing men who are African American. These partnerships offer scarce mental health-related services for this community's needs.

- **Protecting families with access to free health supplies**
  - OHE works with partners to distribute free KN95 masks and COVID-19 tests at local events to help families in Utah stay safe from the spread of COVID-19 and other respiratory viruses. Centro Hispano, a community-based organization serving Hispanic/Latinos in Utah County and elsewhere, distributed more than 500 at-home tests at the Provo Latino Americano festival in September 2023 alone, as well as countless masks. The Utah Pacific Islander Health Coalition distributed masks and at-home test kits at two Pacific Islander outreach events in the past month. Those who received the supplies expressed tremendous relief knowing they could still obtain at-home test kits and KN95 masks at no cost. Through an internal partnership with the DHHS warehouse, OHE can distribute supplies to communities and families when cost is a barrier to health and safety.
- **Supporting tribal elders in urban areas and with in-person services**
  - Through partnership with the Urban Indian Center Salt Lake (UICSL), tribal elders who live in Salt Lake City and surrounding urban areas receive access to health services, share experiences, and learn about health issues they are facing. The UICSL is recognized for providing culturally appropriate services to tribal members who live outside of tribal lands. Through this partnership, tribal elders are offered health services like vaccines, diabetes management, and other health screenings in a culturally considerate way. Tribal elders also have the opportunity to interact with one another, providing an additional protective factor for mental health and well-being. This helps alleviate devastating health impacts of isolation that many older adults experience and was compounded during the pandemic.
- **Supporting tribal members living on reservations with access to a vital heat source**
  - Some community members who live on the Navajo reservation and in rural areas of San Juan County require firewood to warm their homes. Some are unable to access wood due to the remoteness of the area, the geographical landscape, as well as COVID-19 infection. Through an OHE-funded project, the Utah Navajo Health Systems (UNHS) found a creative way to respond to this unique need and coordinated with nearby federal forest land officials to access firewood and firewood donations. UNHS staff delivered firewood to community members' homes to ease the transportation and landscape barrier. One elder who lives alone near the Arizona/Utah state line had only a few pieces of wood left before the UNHS delivery. She called them her "guardian angels" for delivering the wood.
- **Protecting the most vulnerable in long term care and assisted living facilities**
  - Through creative partnerships in the Southwest Utah Public Health Department's jurisdiction, residents of local assisted living facilities have received influenza and other vaccines. These residents, all older than 65, have been offered these crucial

services at their location. This helps a population who experiences among the worst health outcomes from infectious diseases stay safe and well. Vaccination clinics continue throughout the winter as other vaccines become available. In Weber-Morgan Health Department's jurisdiction, older adults are offered wellness classes in local senior centers as well as the Ogden Regional Hospital. These classes are attended by older adults as well as their friends and families. Classes are offered in both English and Spanish.

- **Serving rural communities with same-day resources**

- The Tooele County Health Department is successfully reaching Hispanic/Latinos in the county at in-person health events like the Latin Weeks Health Fair. Despite limited marketing, more than 100 community members were provided with resources at the event. These crucial resources included low-to-no cost glasses, insurance support, tailored nutrition plans, counseling, and more. Other successes include community health workers who partner with community nurses to help facilitate influenza and COVID-19 vaccine clinics throughout every school in the county. This will result in fewer outbreaks and fewer missed school and work days. Because of the success of these clinics, community health workers and community nurses will also work together on rabies vaccine clinics. These same day services help rural communities with timely support where they are and when they need it.

- **Supporting new and expecting moms in ways that are most accessible**

- OHE partners with *Comunidad Materna in Utah* (CMU), a newer community-based organization to support new and expectant moms. This partnership has provided access to support groups held in Spanish for new moms, for families who are expecting, as well as parenting workshops. Each of these groups are offered two times per month, online, to allow accessibility for moms and families who may not have support systems in their language and at their convenience. CMU helps to fill the gap of mental health resources for young families who primarily speak Spanish, and helps them to connect to each other. This is particularly important since many families served by CMU lack health insurance for these types of support services.

- **Creating a clearer picture of community needs in rural Utah and taking steps to meet them**

- In rural areas of the state, community health workers in Southwest Utah Public Health Department's (SWUPHD) jurisdiction work to build connections with communities in rural areas. SWUPHD created a survey to understand what community needs are most pressing and identify areas where they can help. SWUPHD identified many in the community face limited access to dental care. In response, SWUPHD organized free dental service events in Kanab and Beaver, promoted the dental clinic in Kane County to fill all appointments, and is now

collaborating with higher education to further enhance dental care access for the community. Through identifying and meeting community needs, SWUPHD is building strong relationships and trust to improve services and connect families to needed resources.

- **Supporting community impact grants in Central Utah**

- With the support of OHE, the Central Utah Public Health Department (CUPHD) awarded seven grants to local community-based organizations to address and reduce health disparities and advance health equity. Projects were customized and included attributes to improve the health of one or more priority communities such as: racial and ethnic minority groups, frontier communities, LGBTQIA+, individuals with low-income, or other underserved populations. Recipients included the Family Support Center, West Desert Elementary, Utah State University Extension, Central Utah Food Sharing, New Horizons Crisis Center, Snow College Diversity and Inclusion Center, and Stepping Stones Family Counseling. Additionally, CUPHD held Helping Hand resource fairs in each of the six counties and hosted several multicultural resource health fairs and vaccine events to reach the diverse workforce in their jurisdiction.

## Media and communication efforts

- **OHE website (<https://healthequity.utah.gov/>)**

- OHE launched its new website in April 2022 to house its growing library of products in an appealing and user-friendly format. Target audiences include DHHS personnel and external partners (local health departments, other state and local agencies, community-based organizations, academia, general public, etc.).
- **Activities implemented**
  - Continually added new content, primarily reports, throughout the year.
  - Updated visual branding to align with new DHHS standards (August 2023).
  - Presented website to CDC representatives (August 2023).
  - Presented website to first-year medical students from the University of Utah (August 2023).
  - Completed a webpage designed for community health workers to apply for certification (November 2023).
  - Used the website as part of the OHE onboarding process for new hires to familiarize themselves with OHE's projects and mission.
- **Successes**
  - Total website traffic through October 2023 ~12,000 visitors.
  - Website received 10,000th visitor in July 2023.



- **OHE monthly newsletter**

- The OHE monthly newsletter is an outreach tool highlighting OHE's activities for the previous month, including announcements of new reports, project updates, conference appearances, site visits, COVID-19 vaccine events, grant applications, and more. Target audiences include DHHS employees, local health departments, and community-based organizations. A listserv of approximately 750 email accounts currently receives the newsletter.
- **Activities implemented**
  - Distributed a survey to newsletter listserv requesting feedback on structure, design, readability, etc. (April 2023).
- **Successes**
  - Achieved an average open rate of 51%, an increase from 41% in 2022.

**End of legislative report 2023.**